

Vermiculite Northwest, Spokane, Washington

Preliminary Findings

Health Consultation Under Review

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) in cooperation with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is currently reviewing an evaluation of the potential human health risks associated with asbestos from vermiculite ore that was received from Libby, Montana and processed at Vermiculite Northwest, Inc. in Spokane Washington.

Site Background

Vermiculite Northwest, Inc. was located on approximately 1.5 acres at 1318 N. Maple Street in Spokane, Washington in an area of mixed commercial and residential land uses. The facility processed vermiculite ore from the 1940's until it was closed in 1974. The site is now owned by Spokane County. A chain link fence restricts site access. All buildings on-site were destroyed and removed by November of 2002, with the exception of a small structure originally used as office space by the Vermiculite Northwest staff. This building is currently vacant, and is not within the bounds of the fenced area.



Vermiculite Northwest site in Spokane, Washington.

How You Can Help

DOH would like to contact former Vermiculite NW workers and their families to provide them with health education materials, evaluate health effects, and to conduct interviews to obtain additional site-related information to determine health risks. **If you are a former Vermiculite NW worker or family member, or know someone who is**, please contact Gary Palcisko or Marcia Henning:

Toll-free: 1-877-485-7316.

Vermiculite Northwest processed vermiculite ore obtained from a mine in Libby, MT that was last owned and operated by the W.R. Grace Company. The ore was tainted with asbestos. A furnace was used to heat the ore until it expanded or "popped" like popcorn. The resulting product was a lightweight material ideal for insulation and other products. Processing vermiculite was an extremely dusty task; therefore workers were exposed to high levels of asbestos-containing dust.

Asbestos

Asbestos is the name given to a group of six different fibrous minerals (amosite, chrysotile, crocidolite, tremolite, actinolite, and anthophyllite) that occur naturally in the environment. Asbestos minerals have separable long fibers that are strong, flexible enough to be spun and woven, and are heat resistant. Asbestos has been used for a wide range of manufactured goods, mostly in building materials (roofing shingles, ceiling and floor tiles, paper products, and cement products), friction products

(automobile clutch, brake, and transmission parts), heat-resistant fabrics, packaging, gaskets, and coatings.

Breathing asbestos fibers can cause asbestosis, a disease that scars and stiffens the lungs, and two types of cancer: lung cancer, and mesothelioma, a rare cancer of the thin lining surrounding the lung or abdominal cavity. These diseases do not develop immediately, but show up many years later. Early identification and treatment of any cancer can increase an individual's quality of life and survival.

Preliminary Findings

1. **A public health hazard existed for former workers in the Vermiculite NW facility.** Some workers from the facility have been diagnosed with asbestos-related lung disease.
2. People who lived with former workers may have been exposed to asbestos fibers carried home on workers' hair, skin, and clothing. Children who played on vermiculite and stoner rock piles at the site were also probably exposed to airborne asbestos fibers. Currently, not enough information is available to determine if these exposures were enough to affect people's health.
3. People that lived near the facility while it operated (1940s to 1974) may have been exposed to asbestos from plant emissions. Currently, not enough information is available to determine if these exposures were enough to affect people's health.
4. Currently, community exposure to asbestos from the site poses no public health hazard. The site is vacant, and a chain link fence restricts access.
5. **A potential health risk may exist for future on-site workers involved in site redevelopment.** Small amounts of asbestos fibers released into the air by activities that involve excavation or soil disturbance may pose a health concern to on-site workers.
6. Future redevelopment activities at the site are **not a public health concern to the surrounding residential areas.**

Health Actions You Can Take

1. **If you have been exposed to asbestos, you should not smoke.** Cigarette smoke and asbestos together significantly increase your chances of getting lung cancer.
2. **If you have been exposed to asbestos, get flu and pneumonia vaccinations every year.** Caregivers and all household members, whether or not they provide care, also should be vaccinated.

For a free copy of the health consultation when it becomes available, call or e-mail:

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Marcia Henning
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Please see the following websites for more information:

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/naer/index.html>

http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/asbestos_links.html

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/IAQ/AsbestosVermiculiteInsulation.html>

<http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/>